

Testimony IN SUPPORT of House Bill No. 6578 - An Act Concerning Participation in the Electoral Process; and IN SUPPORT of Senate Bill No. 1017- An Act Concerning Election Administration

March 10th, 2021

Dear Senator Mae Flexer (Co-Chair), Representative Dan Fox (Co-Chair), Senator Rob Sampson (Ranking Member), Representative Gale Mastrofrancesco (Ranking Member) and esteemed members of the Government Administration and Elections (GAE) Committee:

My name is Karimah Mickens Webber, I am a voter from Hamden. The vote is the most powerful, non-violent tool in a democratic society. The process to vote should be easy, simple, and convenient. Instead states are creating barriers and making it more difficult for citizens to vote. There are many laws on the books disenfranchising millions of voters such as voter photo identification laws, proof of citizenship laws, and barriers to registration, elimination of early voting and absentee voting, and laws making it harder to restore voting rights for people who have paid their debt to society.

Passing HB 6578, but with needed improvement, is extremely important to me because not only codifying but also **expanding Automatic Voter Registration (AVR) beyond the Dept. of Motor Vehicles (DMV) to other state agencies** is a common-sense reform that saves taxpayer money and helps increase democratic participation.

This bill codifies AVR, as it is happening now at the Dept. of Motor Vehicles, into state law and I applaud that first step. However, we must **also expand AVR to the Dept. of Social Services (DSS), HUSKY, Access Health CT, state colleges and universities and other state agencies.**

Automatic Voter Registration (AVR) **will enhance the security and integrity of our elections** by eliminating outdated addresses and duplicative registrations through an automatic process—**which will deliver the most accurate voter rolls to cities and towns. Eliminating duplicate registrations significantly reduces the workload for localities that could be susceptible to confusion on election day.**

77% of Connecticut voters support Automatic Voter Registration in a recent Secure Democracy public opinion poll. Across the country, localities have **saved an average of about \$3.54 in labor costs per registration** by moving from a paper to an electronic method. Nineteen states have versions of AVR.

Voting is a constitutionally-protected right for American citizens, African-American voters have been systematically disenfranchised by voter suppression laws. Restoring the right to vote to people re-entering their communities on parole is also extremely important to me because **disenfranchising people on parole sustains a racist system of inequality in our state.** Those on parole are concentrated in only a handful of Connecticut communities—those with significant populations of Black and Latino people. Restoring the vote to people leaving prison could aid in their transition /reentry into society. It provides them an opportunity to use the power of their vote to impact the communities they are returning to, the place where they will work, raise their children and rebuild their life.

Connecticut has the most stringent criminal disenfranchisement laws in the Northeast and it is the only state in the region that still prohibits those on parole from casting a ballot. Furthermore, **felony disenfranchisement laws became widespread in the United States after the Civil War as a way for former Confederate states to circumvent Reconstruction amendments and stamp out Black political power.** 20 states allow people on parole to vote and just two weeks ago New York's state senate voted to restore voting rights to those on parole.

Preventing formerly incarcerated people from voting **undermines good-faith attempts at reintegration,** and artificially decreases the voting power of the communities in which people on parole reside.

Lastly, passing SB 1017 is also absolutely necessary so that voters currently qualifying to vote absentee **retain the freedom they had in 2020 to use their town's official, secure ballot drop boxes.**

I urge you to pass HB 6578 **but with expansion of Automatic Voter Registration beyond the Dept. of Motor Vehicles to other state agencies—and I urge you to pass SB 1017.**

Thank you,
Karimah Mickens Webber , Hamden